

THE TIDEWATER MG 'T' CLASSICS

THE DIPSTICK



FEBRUARY 1989

President..... Dave Bowling

Secretary Tom Lund

Vice President Don Jones

Treasurer Frank Benson

Editor Gloria Benson

MARQUE TIME:

The January meeting was well attended and turned out to be a lively session. Jennifer Ash lined up hosts for most of the 1989 meetings and events. (Details inside). If you were unable to attend but would still like to host a particular function, please contact Jennifer.

Don Jones shared his extensive insurance background with us. He pointed out many interesting details which must be covered to protect a vintage or semi-vintage car from loss.

Robert Davis made us all painfully aware of the need to exercise better vigilance in shop safety. He seriously injured his finger in a wrestling bout with his bench grinder. He was cleaning up that "last part" when the wheel snatched away both the part and his finger. OUCH!

Hope to see you all at the forthcoming Wicker Basket Affair at the Haines residence. Should be just what the doctor ordered to cure mid-winter cabin fever!

Safety fast,

Dave

Deadline for the March Newsletter is Friday, February 17th.

January MG Meeting
January 4, 1989

A big THANKS to the Ash's for planning the Christmas Party and to Joe Dillard for providing the location. We also welcomed Ross & Ann Haines since they haven't been at the meetings in some time. The minutes of the last meeting were approved as written except there was a \$.40 difference in the ending balance of the treasurers report.

Treasurers Report - The beginning balance was \$843.08, income of \$143.50, expenses of \$194.17 for an ending balance of \$792.41.

Newsletter - The deadline for articles is January 16, 1989.

Regalia - We have T-Shirts for sale. Extra Small.

Technical Report - Mike Ash thanked Jim Jackson for his article on carbs. Rick Mullins has also offered his garage for the next tech session.

Membership - Rick Mullins renewed his membership, Tom Paul and Jim Sandloop joined as new members.

Activities - A complete schedule of activities and meeting locations will be published in the next Dipstick. A

recommendation of a progressive dinner as an event was made.

Signing up of events and meetings proceeded. The Wicker Basket Affair was discussed and signing up for a covered dish was begun. The event will be held at Ross and Ann Haines's house on January 28, 1989. Please call Ann with the dish you will bring.

Old Business - The MGA register has corresponded with Mike Ash asking how they can assist us. Please see Mike with any suggestions. Don Jones covered insurance needs for speciality cars. It went on for some time as a lively, open discussion. I will not discuss it here as Don is going to write a review for the newsletter. The First place trophy for the last rally was presented.

New Business - The Presidents Participation Trophy was presented to the Ash's.

Marque Time - Ira Canton drove to New Mexico and towed back a MGA. He said he paid almost as much for it as he did his 56 MGA new. Robert Davis bought another Magnette in Milwaukee, Wis. but has not brought it home as yet.

The Raffle was won by Anita McGrigor.

Those in attendance were: Tony Perino, Jim Jackson (MG Midget), Bryan Massey (MGB-1980), Susan Bond (MGBGT-1972), Bob & Kay Bell, Pam & Vince Groover, Craig Barber (MGB-1971), Dan Boswell (MGB-1977), Don Jones, Ira Canton, Jennifer & Mike Ash (MGB), Ross & Ann Haines, Andy Wallach & Cynthia Fasehim, Jock & Anita McGrigor, Frank Benson and Tom Lund.

Membership News

First, news of members moving on... ARLA STRASSER & BILL GRANER got a change of station, and Bill is now at the War College in Rhode Island while Arla is trying to be a Navy Wife; those of us who know Arla well know that she will add a new dimension to that group! ROBIN & CHRISTINE RAPHAEL are now settled down in a home in Belgium, just the two of them, with the children all in schools in England. Finally, newer members, BRYAN & NANCY MASSEY have moved within the Beach area. Please make a note of their new addresses:

STRASSER/GRANER
5 Osage Drive
Middletown, RI. 02840

Ph: 401-849-7144

RAPHAEL
Ops.Division S.H.A.P.E.
B.F.P.O. 26
Gt.Britain
011-32-6544-3294

MASSEY
612 Aubrey Dr.
Va.Beach 23462

456-9085

Please welcome the following new members to the club and add their names to your roster. (Rick Mullins is a renewing member, who missed the roster deadline!)

TOM & KATHIE PAUL
4468 Revere Dr.
Va. Beach, 23456
1972 MGB
Ph: 467-0033-h
445-3488-w

JIM & GEORGIA SANDLOOP
1129 Olive Rd.
Va. Beach, 23464
1974 MGB
474-0325-h
420-8488-w

RICK MULLINS
5121 V.Bch.Bvd.
Norfolk, 23502
1977 Midget
547-0366-h
466-1308-w

Received a communication from Out-of-Town Member HANK GIFFIN the other day..."Knowing the Tidewater Group's penchant for bacchanalian endeavours, I thought this might be helpful in preparing for your next event:

Aunt Donnah's Roast Possum

1 Possum (though possums are not readily available in the Washington metropolitan area, road kills are a possibility. Such aquisition is discouraged, however, unless you personally ran over the animal.)

1 Onion

1Tb. Fat

1/4 tsp. Worcester sauce

1 C. Breadcrumbs

1 Egg, hardboiled

1tsp.Salt water

Remove excess fat from the animal. Rub possum with salt and pepper. Brown the onion in fat and add breadcrumbs, Worcester sauce, egg, salt and water. Mix thoroughly, and stuff possum, trussing as you would a fowl. Put in a roasting pan with bacon across the back and pour a quart of water into the pan. Roast uncovered in oven at 350 degrees until tender - about 2 or 3 hours. Will feed 3 uninformed guests, or 206 if you announce what the dish is prior to serving.

Warm Regards....HANK"

Many thanks, Hank. On the way home from work today, Mike saw the guy 2 cars in front of him have a "kill"; does this count? At any rate, Mike scraped it up and it is in the fridge to be prepared for YOU at the Wicker Basket. You're a big guy and we figure you can eat 206 portions. See ya'!

EVENTS REPORT

Enclosed with this issue you will find the schedule of events for the year. Many thanks to everyone who volunteered to host a meeting or event: it was very gratifying to get such response. Please put these dates onto your calendar for the year so that we can look forward to good participation in all events!

The next event - one most members look forward to all year - is the Wicker Basket Affair on JANUARY 28th. This is a GOURMET pot-luck (prepare enough to serve about 10 portions, as everyone samples a little bit of everything). This started out as a fund-raising event many moons ago, but now we make a nominal charge of \$5 per couple to defray the cost of the beverages and paper- and glass-ware. Please call Ann and Ross Haines at 486-1496 to let them know what you would like to bring, or to find out what is needed, so that we don't have 5 dishes of lasagne! The map to their house is elsewhere in this issue.

UP-COMING EVENTS:

- Jan. 28 (Sat) WICKER BASKET AFFAIR - See Above - 7 p.m. Beverages (wine-punch, wine, beer, soda & coffee) provided. \$5 per couple (cheap night out!). DON'T FORGET TO CALL ANN
- Feb. 7 (Tue) MONTHLY MEETING -Peggy Bradford's (see map) 7:30 p.m.
- 25 (Sun) TECH. SESSION - Rick Mullins' HEATED garage - 10 a.m. until... Bring any tools you think you may need, or call Mike Ash if you don't have the tools you think you may need. *See map page.*

FOR SALE: 1969 MGB - new tires; head with new valve job. "My wife would GIVE it away, but I won't let her!" Call BOB BEAUTER, 482-7840, evenings.

Things have been a bit quiet recently on the technical front. My thanks to Jim Jackson for his article on the late MGB Zenith-Stromberg carburetor in the December Dipstick. Once again, because I do not have any pressing technical topics to discuss, I am going to take the easy way out.

The following article appeared in a recent issue of "Road & Track". For me, it represents the essence of the MG. The MG was always the poor man's sports car. It was never particularly fast or well appointed, but it was fun and it was affordable. Other cars, from Jaguars to Ferraris, were faster and more exotic, but they could never have been more fun to drive than an MG.

The article is written by Peter Egan, who writes a splendid column every month for R&T and often a full length feature article. Peter Egan has a marvelous "turn of phrase" and, to Jennifer and me, his feature articles and columns alone are well worth the subscription price of R&T. The article is, of course, an R&T copyright, and is reproduced without permission. But, with our limited distribution and "not for profit" newsletter, I am sure R&T will understand and appreciate the exposure. So, read and enjoy the article, and I am sure you will all identify with the sentiments expressed therein.

*So long to a good friend, a fun roadster
and a great device for the prevention of cobwebs in the toolbox*

BY PETER EGAN

PHOTOS BY DAVID W. BIRD II

"IT'S TIME to do a wrapup report on the MGB," said the Editor at the staff meeting. "The plan was to own and maintain the car for one year and then sell it, but we've already had it for a year and a half. We're overdue on the final report to our readers."

A silence fell over the room. Throats were cleared, an eyebrow went up here and there, and a few people stirred uneasily in their chairs. At last someone spoke.

"Seems a shame to sell it now. It's running so well."

"Does it make sense," someone else asked, "to sell a convertible like the B when there's still some summer weather left?"

"We could keep it another six months, maybe, and put even more miles on it . . ."

And so on.

The plain truth is, after living with our British Racing Green 1968 MGB for 18 months, no one here wants to see it go away. Least of all yours truly, who did most of the maintenance and repairs and is now plotting to buy the car from the magazine and squirrel it away in his own garage. The MGB has had its ups and downs since we bought it, but has gradually won the hearts and/or minds of virtually the whole staff, including our resident Anglophobe (who just nabbed the MG for the weekend, I might add, and left our parking lot not five minutes ago, top down and hair streaming in the wind like one of the Katzenjammer Kids in full flight).

We bought the MGB in March 1987, for \$1500 with the idea of owning, maintaining and driving it for one year, partly to see what sorts of repair problems might crop up and partly as a yardstick to measure what we've gained and lost relative to the ever-changing parade of shiny new test cars that march through our parking lot. The plan was not to restore the car, but to maintain it in good driveable condition.

Fifteen hundred dollars may seem a low price for a roadster with a straight body and only a few thousand miles on a completely rebuilt engine, but those who read our initial report may remember that the car had a few problems at the time of purchase. The smog gear was missing (air pump, gulp valve and air injector nozzles) and an early non-smog cylinder head had been fitted. That's a big no-no in California, where you can't pass a smog test or transfer the registration without all the original equipment in place. Also, our car featured cheap aftermarket seats with the stuffing coming out, a small competition-style steering wheel, a ragged rag-top and a sun-induced chasm in the dash vinyl. Not a perfect car, in other words, but typical of the sort of MGB you find in the \$1500-\$2500 category.

Smog equipment and cylinder head were located at a Midwest junkyard for a cost of \$548, including a valve job with new exhaust valves, guides and springs. Interestingly, the car ran much better with the new head and smog gear installed, perhaps because of better porting on the later heads. We found a proper MGB steering wheel and a correct set of 1968 seats from a parts car (\$40) and re-covered them with a new original-style leather upholstery kit (\$300) from Moss Motors (PO Box MG, Goleta, Calif. 93117). We also ordered and installed a new convertible top from Moss (\$270), a new dash-top cover (\$45) and a Midas muffler and tailpipe job (\$144).

That load of stuff, along with a few incidentals like tuneup parts, registration, oil and a new choke cable catapulted our costs to a little more than \$3000, essentially doubling the price of our car. Nevertheless we now had a nice-looking, good-running MGB with a lot of brand-new pieces.

Since then, our expenses and labor have been a blend of low-key refurbishing, normal maintenance and a virtual Master List of everything that normally goes wrong with an MGB.

For instance: The dual 6-volt batteries (and their clever built-to-fail cap connectors) went south; the SU fuel pump quit (over and over, between sharp raps from the lead knock-off hammer), as did the replacement SU fuel pump, which was replaced by an aftermarket pump that is still pumping fine; the wiper switch broke while stuck in the ON position one screech-filled night; and, of course, the clutch machined itself to nothingness in short order.

MGB clutches are relatively short-lived and expensive to replace because engine removal is part of the job, though on some models a truly masochistic mechanic can twist and wrestle the gearbox back and out of the way while cursing and smashing his knuckles. Either way, it's about a 7-hour job, so some of the best values in used MGBs tend to be those with slipping clutches. Luckily, I was out of town on vacation when the clutch in our MGB quit clutching, so this \$474 job was farmed out to a local shop.

Other repairs? New front A-arm bushings, brake pads, rear axle bearings and seals, U-joints, speedometer repair, new Lucas starter, fan switch and the usual tuneup and oil change expenses. Also, in the fluke category, one of our engine side-covers fell off on the highway, something that Never Happens.

So what we have now is an MGB that has cost us a little more than \$4000 in total expenses, excluding gasoline. It runs beautifully at the moment, and even looks pretty good, except for a fender dent inflicted at the bank parking lot by an octogenarian who let the 6-ft x 300-lb door of his land yacht get away from him. Rumbling on the horizon are a few more repairs if the car is really going to be right: There is a light clunk (okay, not too light) coming from the driveshaft spline, the kingpins are moving slightly and could use rebuilding, the wire wheels have more than enough dead spokes to warrant tightening and re-truing, and the driver's side carpeting is full of heel holes. Also, years of outdoor living have so oxidized the body that a repaint is probably in order if the car is to look really good.

Current value of the car, in its present appearance, is probably somewhere around \$2500 in the Southern California market. That means we're about \$1500 behind if you care to see the MG in the cold, clinical light of investment. Much of that \$4000 total, however, covers normal maintenance you would have on any car, and some is for labor the mechanically minded owner could easily do himself. If he weren't conveniently on vacation, for instance, when the clutch job came along.

My own labor on the car would have cost less than \$1000, if performed on flat rate by a \$35-an-hour shop. Which means that if we had bought the MG, had all the repairs done and never laid a hand on it, the total cost for the car, new parts and a year and a half of driving would be \$5000.

That's a fair amount of money to spend on an old "affordable" MGB.

Bear in mind, however, that these expenses were incurred on a car that was in nearly constant use. Most people buy an older roadster as a second or third car for an occasional Sunday morning drive or cruising to work with the top down on a nice day. Our MGB, by contrast, was used for commuting nearly every day by a different staff member and taken for long drives each weekend. The 11,000 miles we put on the car (running

the total up to 79,137) probably represent three or four years of driving for the average MGB owner. For instance, I bought a 1971 MGB in 1981 for \$1800, spent \$500 on tires, fuel pump and minor repairs during the first two weeks of ownership and drove it for two more years without a single problem, racking up only about 4000 miles.

Which is all a very long way of saying that the MGB is a very good car, but has just enough idiosyncrasies that it lends itself more to the care and attention of a single owner than it does to fleet use. Even so, our long-term classic held up remarkably well, and most of the repairs we made were simply a game of catch-up, to correct previous neglect and put the car back in working order.

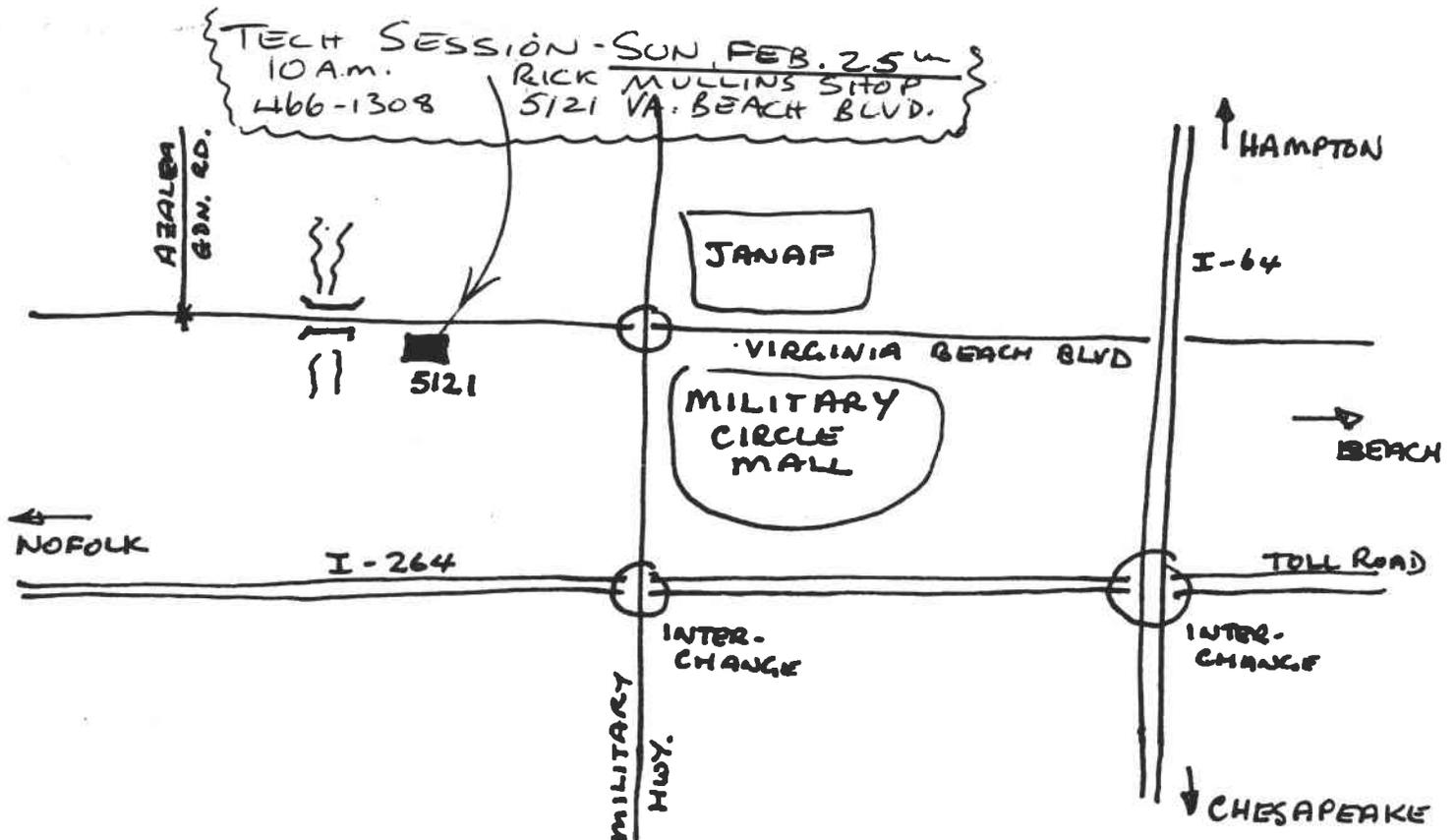
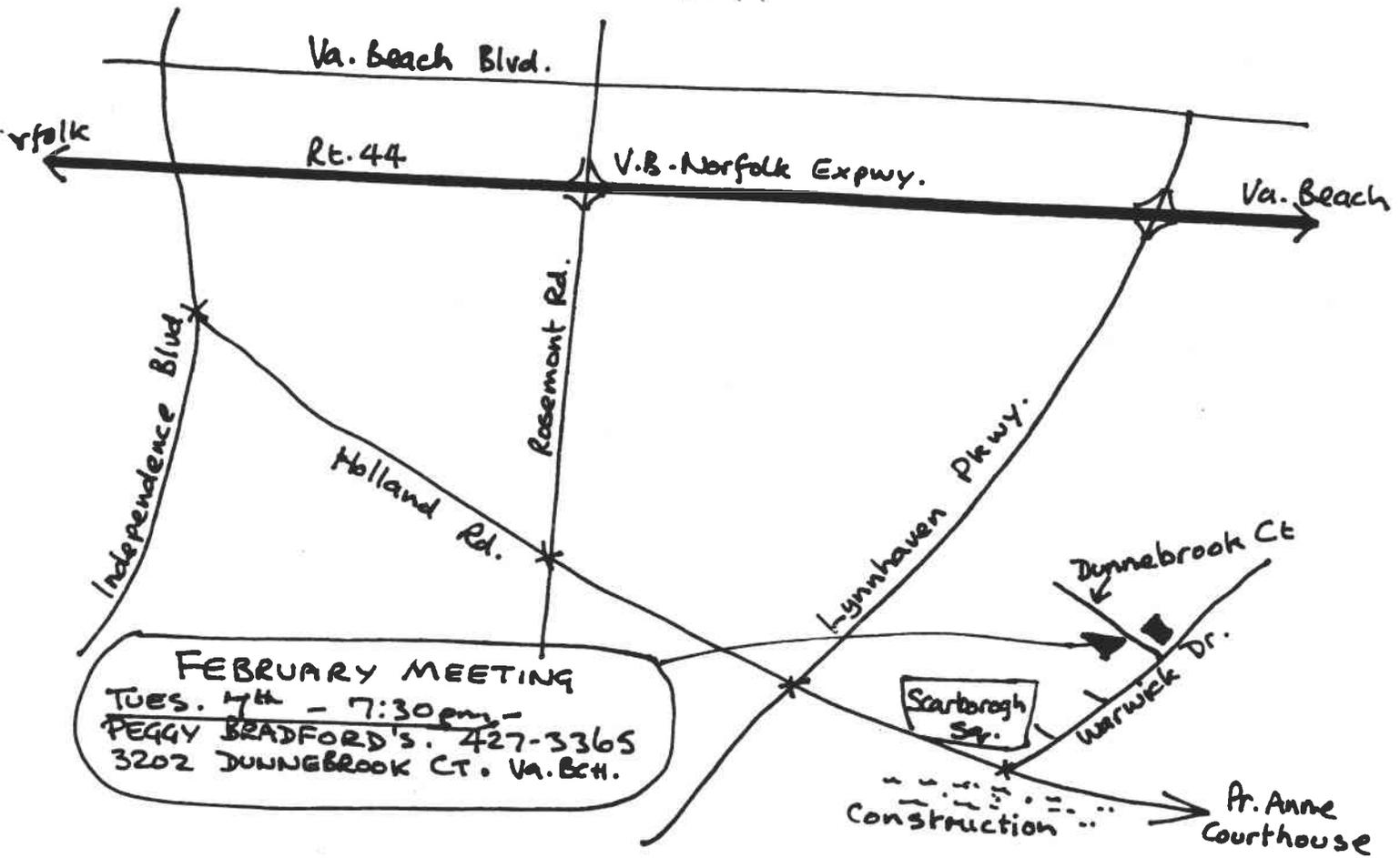
More important than the numbers, especially with a car like the MGB, is what might be called the emotional involvement factor. Some cars grow on you with familiarity; others don't. And for nearly all the staff, the MGB was in the former class, for a number of reasons.

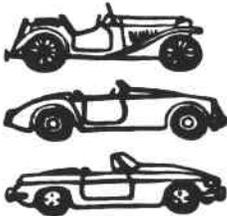
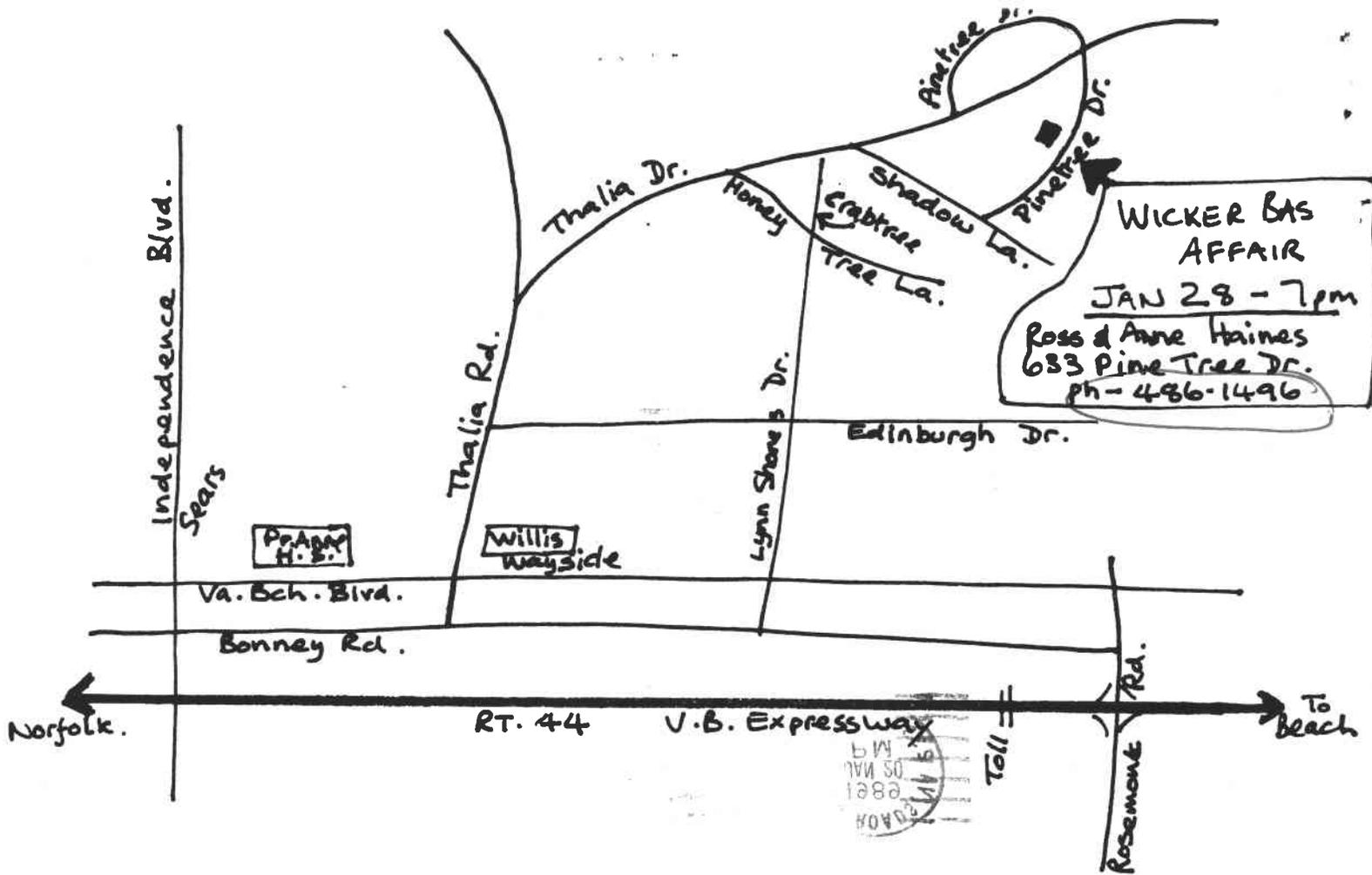
First, it's a crisp, clean design that still looks good more than a quarter of a century after its introduction. And the handsome shape is more than skin deep; the unibody chassis is extremely strong and well crafted, resisting rattles and creaks. The engine is torquey and flexible, the gearbox shifts and the steering rack steers with pleasing mechanical directness. Handling is excellent, especially considering the age of the suspension design.

Most important for the home hobbyist, there is virtually nothing to go wrong with an MGB that can't be repaired by an owner with reasonable mechanical skills and a good shop manual. The car need never go to a shop again if you don't want it to. And parts are still readily available from a number of sources. The MGB is also simple and basic enough to make a great introductory project car for the fledgling mechanic. (A surprising amount of mail we've received on our earlier long-term reports has come from father/son teams who are in the midst of full MGB restorations.)

Disadvantages? The MGB requires more maintenance and care than a modern econobox. It's not a drive-it-and-forget-it car. Involvement is called for, and a certain amount of mechanical sense. Also, it isn't really much of a high-speed cross-country touring car. Our B came equipped with only the standard 4-speed gearbox, without the optional overdrive to drop the revs on the highway, so it's pretty busy and noisy on the freeway or crossing the wide open spaces. If you want to cover vast distances quickly and arrive unruffled, buy a 911. The MGB is a country-lane car.

And a good one at that. It's going to be missed around here. At least by all those benighted, unfortunate folks who haven't got the good sense to own one.





TIDEWATER M.G. CLASSICS
5149 BELLAMY MANOR DR.
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA. 23464



FIRST CLASS